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Gnostic Novel Of Mikhail Bulgakov: Sources And Exegesis

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CHAPTER ONE

THE COGNITIVE AESTHETICS OF MIKHAIL BULGAKOV

When the Master, listening to Ivan Bezdomny's account of Yeshua's trial, as told to Berlioz and him by the mysterious stranger, exclaims, "How did I guess. How correctly did I guess!" the readers are offered a very important clue to Bulgakov's artistic code. The exclamation establishes a structural and semantic link between the Judean and Moscow levels of the narrative in the overall design of the novel. Chudakova is the first scholar to recognize in the Master's remark a statement of Bulgakov's own aesthetic position:

> Reality, in his conception, has an appearance that can be uniformly read. The duty of an artist is then either to *see* it directly (as Bulgakov saw the Civil War or Moscow of the twenties) or to *guess* it as the Master and his creator guessed Yeshua and Pilate.... Here the same mirror-principle is in action: having become convinced of how correctly to the minute details the Master guessed the Gospel event, the reader is, in a way, compelled to believe that the creator of the Master, that is, the author of the "other" novel of which the first is a part, comprehends the contemporary life described in it with an equal power of insight and the same truthfulness to all details. Artistic creativity itself can be seen as a process towards a complete and unmediated comprehension of the true appearance of reality.[1]

The Yershalaim story is thus a matrix. Through a seamless superimposition of the archetypal paradigm in the Yeshua-Pilate plot over the Moscow story, a correct understanding of the existential situation of modernity can be achieved.

This critical approach, no doubt constructive in examining the semantics of structural parallelisms on various levels of narration in their typifying paradigmatical function, proves to be insufficient for the comprehension of the ultimate nature of the motive forces and agents behind the action of the novel. Although it allows us to catch a glimpse of some of Bulgakov's

compositional techniques, Chudakova's observation does not provide the clue needed to decode the novel's system of signification. While the paradigmatical patterns and situations on all levels of the narrative project the true appearance, *oblik*, of reality, the true image of the *noumenal* reality behind its *phenomenal* social and psychological facade, *lik*, in the terminology of the Russian Symbolists,[2] remains largely beyond the grasp of the critic.

Therefore, individual symbolic signification is needed to capture the ultimate reality behind the metaphysical notions of "light" and "darkness," to comprehend the nature of the agents acting behind the appearance of Yeshua and the demons, and to explain the *condition humaine* of the various human protagonists. Within the novel, these ultimate "realities" are neither artistic metaphors for or allegories of the psychological states of the human mind, nor a reflection of sociopolitical processes discovered by Bulgakov in ancient Jerusalem and contemporary Moscow. In the novel, ultimate realities possess lives of their own. Thus, they cannot be explained within the confines of a three-dimensional system of motivation in a realistic novel nor dismissed by the commonplace "It cannot be." Dostoevsky's devil can still, though not completely, be interpreted as a hallucination of Ivan Karamazov. Bulgakov's Woland, on the contrary, can by no means be seen as a product of the Master's state of mind, though, like Ivan, the Master is mentally ill and would prefer to explain Satan in terms of a hallucinatory delirium.[3] In Bulgakov's universe, the transrational and supernatural, though inaccessible to human intellect, are ontologically true.

Still, the Master's exclamation, "How correctly did I guess," may provide critics with answers to their questions about the nature of Bulgakov's cognitive aesthetics. The verb "guess" in its aesthetically cognitive function can be traced back to Pushkin's appraisal of Gogol's artistic talent. Gogol, as no writer before him, could "guess the banal in a banal man." Thus the act of artistic "guessing" acquires epistemological significance as a mode of the cognition in images. To "guess the banal in a banal man" means, in this context, an apprehension of the essential characteristics of a particular individual on the part of the artist. Such cognition manifested in its noumenal singularity constitutes a concrete intuitive knowledge of reality made accessible through the artist's creative act. The paradigmatical and singular complement each other. An individual's existence projected in a literary personage asserts its value and significance through its artistic realization in a system of mythical and social paradigms. The interaction between different levels of narration and between the personages themselves can be perceived on a background of the

three-dimensional, that is, "realistic,"[4] system of motivation or in a multi-dimensional model of reality in which boundaries between the natural and metaphysical become increasingly unstable and, eventually, illusory. The latter model constitutes the universe of Bulgakov in *The Master and Margarita.*

In the process of writing his novel, Bulgakov had to face what may seem to be an unsurmountable obstacle. On the one hand, he was searching for a system of imagery to convey effectively his ideologically unorthodox views of the human condition and his apocalyptic sense of history to the reader. On the other hand, in order to protect himself against the censorship and abuse of official literary critics, he was forced to encode the imagery in an intricate system of ingenious cryptography.

Bulgakov has succeeded in both endeavors. As a final result, he has created a work which occupies an honorable place among the best esoteric and occult novels of the Russian Symbolist prose written before the Revolution of 1917, such as Sologub's *The Petty Demon,* Bryusov's *The Fiery Angel,* and Bely's *The Silver Dove* and *Petersburg.* Moreover, Bulgakov's last novel can be seen as his finest contribution to the heritage of the Russian philosophical and cultural renaissance of the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Yet, immediately after its publication in 1966-67, his novel fell victim to a sort of critical nemesis. Even if he might have outsmarted the censors posthumously,[5] the perfection of Bulgakov's artistic code and the gap between the cultural tradition of Bulgakov and the modern readers made the interpretation of the novel's message a discouragingly thankless task. The complex image structure of the text lends itself, with varying degrees of success, to both "mystical" or "idealistic" and "structuralist" or "deconstructionist" explanations, depending on the ideological preferences or professional training of the critic. Zerkalov expresses the frustrations of many critics in his observation that the semantic texture of the novel "cannot be reduced to any one-sided conception, either religious or anti-ecclesiastic."[6] Paradoxically, the nightmarish "cerebral game" of Bely's *Petersburg,* termed "astral novel" by Berdyaev, enjoys incomparably greater consensus on the subject of its meaning than does *The Master and Margarita,* despite its lucid prose and largely realistic stage sets.

The wide divergence of critical opinion cannot be, however, explained solely in terms of Bulgakov's self-protective cryptography or as a breakdown in cultural communication. The very nature of the metaphysical

reality which constitutes the ontological basis of Bulgakov's universe cannot be apprehended and expressed artistically other than by means of symbolic ambivalence. This is the common ground which Bulgakov and the Russian Symbolists share. Though, as Vyacheslav Ivanov points out, a symbol is a sign or signification, it must not necessarily denote a single definite idea. If this were so, a "symbol would be a mere hieroglyph and a combination of several symbols would constitute a figurative allegory, that is, a cipher open to reading by means of a discovered clue. If a symbol is a hieroglyph, then it is a mysterious hieroglyph, mysterious because it signifies many things and conveys many meanings. On different levels of consciousness the same symbol acquires different meanings."[7]

The semantic ambivalence of a symbol does not grant, however, license to countless numbers of equally plausible interpretations of a work based on a stream of free associations or on some spurious logical or intuitive claim. To reach a symbol's true message, the correct identification of the level of consciousness on which the aesthetic cognition of a creative artist acts is required. Thus, as Andrey Bely stresses, the very act of cognition is determined by concepts of norm and value.[8] Consequently, the cognitive and axiologically normative function of symbol unfolds itself in a trinominal formula:

> 1) symbol as the image of what is visible. It activates our emotions through the correct correspondence of its features with the things familiar to us in the surrounding reality;
>
> 2) symbol as an allegory which conveys the ideal meaning of an image: philosophical, religious, social;
>
> 3) symbol as a call toward creation of life.[9]

In this essentially existential function of art, "a symbolic image is neither the first, nor the second, nor the third. It is a living totality of the content of consciousness, a content which is experienced and lived."[10]

Symbolist aesthetic theories recognize both the religious function of art and the ability of a creative act to reach the noumenal core behind phenomenal reality. Science and art, each in its own specific ways, develop their methods and skills to apprehend "things in themselves."[11] The already familiar keyword, "guessing," is the term applied by Bely to the activity of those who live art and experience symbolic images in a personally interiorized way.[12] Art, similarly to all other kinds of cognition, activates a

formative transfiguration of chaos into cosmos and asserts itself as a constitutive force in the spiritual, moral, and social transformation of life:

> The *essence* of art is the absolute principle revealing itself through one or another aesthetic form. The *meaning* of art is a manifestation with a view to realizing this principle. It is possible to perceive this purposefulness in the correlation of forms of creative activity, and, taking a step further, to connect this purposefulness with more general goals. It must be remembered that, from this perspective, an extension of the aesthetics' meaning inevitably subordinates art to more general norms. In the aesthetics a trans-aesthetic criterion becomes visible. Art is here not so much art as skill (τέχνε), but rather as a creative exposure and transformation of life forms. Proceeding this way, we are confronted with the variety of existing forms and techniques which do not comprehend in themselves the *meaning* of art, but are themselves comprehended in this meaning.[13]

As a later specimen of Symbolist prose, *The Master and Margarita* accommodates itself very well to the ideas of its theoreticians. In this sense, it may also be called a "gnostic" novel: it offers not only a philosophical, religious, and social interpretation of life, but also calls to its creative spiritual regeneration.

Not only the novel but also the world constitutes cipher. Both can be effectively correlated if a creative artist correctly "guesses" the people and events in their objective mode of existence at a given point in the empirical or historical "here" and "now" and reconstitutes his or her original vision in the individually unique medium of his or her own art form. Thus the novel's Pilate is both "guessed" (550) and "created" (799) by the Master. Re-called to his new literary existence on the pages of the Master's novel, he is "released" at the end of the book when, having transcended the three-dimensional limitations of the terrestrial "basement," the Master "completes" his novel on an aesthetic level in the dimension beyond. At the same time, Pilate is "redeemed" as the Master merges his will with the will of Yeshua (797) on the level of theurgy and thus becomes a coparticipant in Yeshua's redemptive act of mercy. The code of the Master in the Pilate-Yeshua story and that of the narrator of the Moscow events are the same. This technique establishes a sense of unity between the field of cognition and the principal message of the novel in spite of the disparity between the narrative styles and historical background of the two plots. In fact, *The Master and Margarita* in its thematic unity can be viewed as a superb

example of the compositional technique of the fugue applied by Bulgakov to the level of the verbal art.

Even Woland's famous aphorism, "Manuscripts do not burn" (703), can be seen as a literary comment on Bely's theoretical tenet: "The law of preservation of creative work is one of the fundamental laws of the formal aesthetics."[14] Bulgakov's own anguished cry in *The Notes on the Cuffs*, "one cannot destroy what has been written," preempting by more than a decade Woland's words,[15] and reflecting Bulgakov's painful awareness of his unavoidable ethical responsibility for the truthfulness and artistic quality of his literary production provides a telling illustration how literary and autobiographical facts blend almost undistinguishably in Bulgakov's life and work. Art understood as the totality of perception and the realization of the meaning of existence is part of the religious sense of life: "The religious meaning of art is esoteric: the content of art constitutes here a content of the transfigured life. Art calls to such a life."[16]

Consequently, Symbolist literature preoccupies itself with rites of passage. In Bely's *Petersburg*, the novel's action reflects a cosmic contest between the White Domino, an anthroposophic projection of Christ, and the demonic occult powers of nothingness. Its personages discover the right way toward their illumination and redemption after groping for it between the Scilla and Charibdis of revolution and reaction, terrorism and provocation, which in all instances reveal themselves as the deceitful materializations of the satanic "Turanian cause." Similarly, in *The Master and Margarita*, the novel's protagonists are drawn into the cosmic struggle between good and evil. They are faced with the tantalizing choice between Yeshua's call to follow him to Heavenly Jerusalem and the deceptive temptations of Woland's realm of shadows, with Bulgakov's apocalyptic Moscow replacing the apocalyptic Petersburg of Gogol, Dostoevsky, and Bely.

The plots of *Petersburg* and *The Master and Margarita* consist, in varying degrees of complexity, of a number of subplots. These subplots realize or allude to the paradigms through which the symbolic cognition of reality as experienced truth is achieved and implemented in order to attain a higher state of existential awareness. Thus, the novel takes over the function of a myth and elevates artistic prose to a higher stage of realism. In Vyacheslav Ivanov's words, "Realistic Symbolism will discover *myth* in the symbol. Only from the symbol comprehended as reality can myth grow as a tree grows from a seed. For myth is the truth about everything existing."[17] "Myth is the remembrance of a mystical event, that is, of a cosmical mystery and sacrament."[18]

Ivanov's statement thus implies that, on the levels of aesthetic cognition and theurgy, artistic imagination proceeds *a realibus ad realiora.* It progresses from real to more real, from the outer shell of phenomenal appearance to reality's noumenal, ontological base and, finally, to the metaphysical source of being.

According to Bely, in Symbolist theory, mythical cognition and esoteric knowledge are not subjected to any *a priori* religious dogma.[19] This accounts, at least partly, for the liberties that Bulgakov takes with the Scriptures in *The Master and Margarita,* liberties which were erroneously interpreted as demythologizations of the Gospel stories. It would be more appropriate to describe Bulgakov's position as a variation of twentieth-century Christian gnosis.

Furthermore, Bely's view of music as the supreme art form that achieves, by breaking down barriers between time and space, the most unmediated access to truth possible in the arts[20] helps the reader understand the pivotal role that diverse musical themes and allusions play in decoding the ultimate meaning of the novel's structural motifs and narrative patterns.[21] The clearly discernible traces of some Symbolist critical texts assimilated in the texture of his novel testify to Bulgakov's more than fleeting interest in the theories of the Symbolists.[22] The tacit presence of many other essentially paraphrased passages from diverse literary and historical sources, and the way that Bulgakov uses them, provide invaluable insight into the writer's encoding technique and shed light on his general heuristic principle.

The Symbolist approach to literature shapes the narrative texture of Bulgakov's early prose as well. This observation pertains not only to his satire, very Gogolian in tonality and spirit, but also to his first novel, *The White Guard,* written in an almost ostentatious realistic vein. *The White Guard* is one of the earliest examples of Bulgakov's novelistic skill, displayed at its apex in the Yershalaim chapters of *The Master and Margarita,* to fill the palpably three-dimensional, colorful and concrete imagery worthy of Tolstoy with the profound esoteric content favorably comparable to the mythopoetic creations of Gogol, Dostoevsky, and Bely. On its own merits, *The White Guard* can be cited as a fine example of Symbolist realism as it is defined in Vyacheslav Ivanov's theoretical writings.

No less instructive is the fact that most of the pivotal symbolic images found in Bulgakov's early prose reappear with similar functions and with

essentially the same content in *The Master and Margarita.* Thus, Bulgakov's prose displays a remarkable cohesion of form and content, an unbroken continuity of meaning and message effectively conveyed to readers through a stable system of symbols. To apply Bely's words to Bulgakov's novel, in *The Master and Margarita* "metaphysics turns into the theory of values" and "art turns into mythology and religion."[23]

Yet, in *The Master and Margarita,* Bulgakov's reservations about the cognitive aesthetics of the Symbolists become quite apparent. The Symbolists' conception of religion is embedded in their theory of aesthetics and is more of an academic nature than a personal commitment to faith. Therefore, for Bely, whose aesthetic theories are strongly influenced by the ideas of the Neo-Kantian philosopher Heinrich Rickert, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Wagner, "the living image of the Logos" that "should be in the center of art," can be Christ, Buddha, or Dante's Beatrice.[24] Bulgakov, who had received a more traditional religious upbringing than Bely, apparently felt it necessary to integrate the Symbolists' conception of myth and symbol into a body of aesthetics reflecting the verities and values of his own system of religious metaphysics.

Bulgakov's Yeshua is incomparably closer to the Jesus Christ of Christianity than Bely's White Domino, a clearly mythical Christ-like figure endowed with some vague features of a fertility spirit in agricultural pre-Christian cults. And if Bulgakov's Yeshua does, indeed, reflect a "living image of the Logos," then it must be that of the Word of God (John 1:1–5) and not of a superhuman mythical archetype projecting numinous energy in a deified historical, legendary, or even literary personality.

Another Russian thinker and a contemporary of the Symbolists whose philosophical and epistemological ideas seem to have affected Bulgakov's approach to the major problems of philosophy and ethics is Paul Florensky, a brilliant theologian, mathematician, and scientist. After examining what is left of Bulgakov's library, Chudakova points out the importance of Florensky's booklet, *Fictions in Geometry,* in the treatment of multi-dimensional aspects of space and time in *The Master and Margarita.* The booklet also recounts Florensky's arguments in favor of the cognitive ability of an artist's creative intuition to transcend the three-dimensional confines of our empirical reality and to "guess" in a work of literary art the spiritual realms of existence inaccessible through positivist or rationalist mode of inquiry.[25]

As will be shown in the subsequent chapters, there is sufficient textual evidence of Bulgakov's familiarity with the body of Florensky's philosophical and theological thought as formulated in his major work, *The Pillar and Foundation of Truth*. Bulgakov's critique of rationalism, his exposure of the nature of evil, his insistence on making the existential choice between the objective values of good and evil, and the theme of rest, central in Bulgakov's body of writing, can all be seen as a brilliant exposition by the writer of the major themes in Florensky's religious philosophy. Furthermore, Florensky's emphasis on the antinomical nature of the human cognition of metaphysical reality was utilized by Bulgakov as a philosophical supplement and counterbalance both to Vyacheslav Ivanov's ideas about the ambivalence of myth and to the Neo-Kantian approach of Bely's theory of norm and value. Within the system of Bulgakov's cognitive aesthetics, Florensky antinomic metaphysics serves a twofold purpose. On the one hand, it sets limits to the rather nondescript esoteric doctrines of the Symbolists, making them more compatible with Bulgakov's own religious convictions. On the other, Florensky's ideas reinforce, in a sense, the epistemological position of Bely and Vyacheslav Ivanov. At stake is the question about the cognitive potentialities of mythical thinking as a heuristic principle.

Depending on literary theory, the genre of the novel-myth may create hermeneutical problems. The ambivalent nature of symbol and myth as artistic vehicles for the actualization of a diversity of meanings on the background of the unity of binary opposites poses some vexing problems in Bulgakov criticism. The propensity of myth to be reproduced infinitely granted, would not all attempts to arrive at a definitive interpretation of the novel be both inappropriate and futile?[26] And if so, how can a consensus about the novel's message be reached? Furthermore, assuming simply that every work of art essentially represents a system of signification and that all codes of signification are arbitrary, one may postulate whether or not a meaningful relationship can be established only within a system of signs. A cognitive relationship between signs and "reality" remains, however, beyond the grasp of a critic.

Whatever the merits of this argumentation may be, it is unlikely that Bulgakov would accept it as a theoretical foundation for his work, and neither would the Symbolists. This explains why, after accepting the ideas of the value-oriented Neo-Kantianism of Heinrich Rickert, Bely rejects in *Petersburg* the "value-free" logical Neo-Kantianism of Hermann Cohen. Bulgakov started his work on *The Master and Margarita* with the question, "What should this second novel be about? What shall I tell mankind?"[27] In

1931, while working on his manuscript, he jotted down the anguished marginal remark, "Lord, help me finish this novel."[28] A few days before his death, he instructed his wife to publish his novel with the words, "They must know! They must know!"[29] In view of the very personal nature of these statements and of their emotional intensity, it is safe to surmise that, while writing his last novel, Bulgakov certainly had something more in mind than a literary artifact of sophisticated mystification, an elegant play with irony and paradoxes, or an ingenious display of parody. Bulgakov believed that a body of knowledge is preserved in his novel. It is an encoded, secret knowledge, *gnosis*, communicable in a system of symbolic cypher. The message could be encoded and preserved only if the infinite reproduction of myth as a vehicle of meaning could be interrupted and circumscribed at some point in the associative cognitive process. This aim could be achieved by reducing the ambivalent signals of symbolic images and motifs to their inherent antinomic proposition, that is to an image which, in a different narrative and semantic context, could be applied equally to the mutually exclusive contents.

The antinomy is the limit that a mythical symbol can go. At that point it describes the paradox of being. Thus, in Bulgakov's novel, on the level of phenomenal reality, the antinomy accounts for Woland's sophism about light and darkness, good and evil, temptingly presented as relative categories in the dialectical unity of binary opposites. Yet on the noumenal level of reality, antinomy shows that, ontologically, good and evil are irreconcilable opposites that do not mix. *Regressus ad infinitum*, potentially inherent in a myth, is thus eluded by the author through the skillful use of antinomies. In the cognitive aesthetics of *The Master and Margarita*, Bulgakov elevates antinomy to an efficient tool. At the same time, antinomy becomes a no less potent device for correlating the semantic and formal levels of the narrative.

In order to become an intrinsic part of the artistic texture of *The Master and Margarita*, the philosophical, theological, and mythical verities had to be integrated into the unified experience of aesthetic perception. The verities themselves had been envisaged as an essential aspect of the aesthetic object. In other words, Bulgakov faced the task of exposing symbols as transrational unities of form and content, thus implementing in his work one of the major tenets of the Symbolists.[30] His task was, however, facilitated by the circumstance that the antinomies of cognition can be accommodated on the formal level of the literary text by means of irony and paradox. Indeed, irony determines the stylistic tonality of the Moscow chapters and is built into their satirical context.

However, Bulgakov assigns a far more important role to parody than to irony in accommodating the antinomies of ideas and myth. The parody serves as a major tool in constructing the paradoxical and yet well-balanced universe of the novel. In order to fully understand the compositional and cognitive function of parody in *The Master and Margarita*, a methodological distinction between the author and the personages created by him must be clearly drawn. It has been largely overlooked by critics that not Bulgakov himself but rather Woland and his demons are the principal agents through whom the parody of the sacred symbols and verities of faith is introduced in the novel's narrative. Bulgakov's own deviations from the Gospels in the Yershalaim chapters cannot be viewed as instances of parody in the strict sense of this word, since they neither ridicule nor travesty the ideas and events reported in the primary source. They merely defamiliarize the traditional narration in order to convey to modern readers the deeper meaning of the Yershalaim events and the personal dilemma of Pilate, thus transforming a historical drama into a mystery play. Woland, on the contrary, mocks and trivializes the cosmical significance of the events and the related liturgical symbols in order to challenge and discredit them.

Bulgakov's intentions are not difficult to guess. In a sense, parody is the sister of irony. The functional validity of parody in the structure of Bulgakov's antinomic universe presupposes the similar validity of the structures parodied. The invisible object of Woland's scorn which constitutes also the invisible, but nonetheless present, compositional structures of the novel (a unique compositional technique in European literature) is the order of the sacred.

Another important approach towards integrating philosophical or religious ideas in the particular narrative patterns of *The Master and Margarita* can be detected in what may be called here, in a more general sense, the technique of collage. It consists in the incorporation of individual images, sentences and passages, borrowed from diversified sources, into the body of the novel's narrative. They are inserted into the text either relatively intact or with various degrees of deformation of the original source.

In the first instance, the objective meaning of an idea or of a structural image in the context of a borrowed source is simply transplanted in *The Master and Margarita* while serving the same semantic function. In the second instance, the intentional deformation of the original literary or historical facts points invariably to an important clue with the help of which Bulgakov's special message can be deciphered and read. In all instances, the

identification and study of Bulgakov's sources is imperative for the proper understanding of the novel's compositional and semantic structures. In *The Master and Margarita,* mythic, theological and literary allusions serve as source of meaning. Similarly, cross-references between related motifs and narrative patterns within *The Master and Margarita,* no matter how their similarity may be disguised on different levels of the narrative, divulge their function as Bulgakov's vehicles of cognition in the novel.

Another device on which the structural unity of *The Master and Margarita* largely depends and through which the symbolic emblematization of the antinomical nature of metaphysical reality in Bulgakov's universe is performed is that of numerology.

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At this point, we are obliged to ask two questions. Will not a numerological hypothesis lead the critic into the realm of irresponsible and unprovable conjectures? Are there any reasons to believe that Bulgakov had displayed a visible interest in magic numbers and used them in his works?

The second question can be answered in the affirmative. Scholarly research has demonstrated Bulgakov's use of numerological symbolism in his first novel *The White Guard,* specifically of the apocalyptic number 666 associated with the Ukrainian revolutionary leader and socialist Petlyura.[31] It can be added at this juncture that also the "lounge car 4173 infested with bed bugs" (116) and serving as the field headquarters of Colonel Toropets, Petlyura's commander, displays visible numerological significance. The magic addition of the digits in this number equals "fifteen." Representing a variation of the magic "six," this number, not unlike the apocalyptic 666, is also related to the devil. In this numerological context, the "howl of the six machine guns" (121) which signals Colonel Bolbotun's assault against the outnumbered White defenders of the City, belongs to the same semantically negative category of symbols. Similarly, the 11,000 rubles in the possession of the Jewish businessman and supplier of the hetman's troops, who was sabered down by one of Petlyura's officers (124), have a negative numerological signification. The number 11,000 represents the "accursed money" which may be seen in the last novel as one of the instrumental causes both of the arrest and execution of Yeshua and of the demise of Judas. Structurally, this observation is confirmed in the texts by the identical exclamation of the victims in both novels, "Take the money, but spare my life" (124, 732). The number "thirteen" with its demonic overtones is used by Bulgakov in the stories "House No. 13" and "Diaboliad." "Diaboliad" is

especially rich in numerological symbols which reappear more than 10 years later in their original ominous or demonic function in *The Master and Margarita*. These numbers are "two," "six" (including the unholy "sixth entrance"), "seven," "eleven," "fifteen," and "forty." Another number used by the writer in *The Master and Margarita,* the cryptic number "302" appears for the first time with its sinister signification in "Diaboliad" as early as 1925. It is mentioned in association with the devil in *Theatrical Novel.* Finally, it reappears in *The Master and Margarita* as House 302-bis, invaded by Woland and his retinue.[32]

Still, even if the legitimacy of a numerological hypothesis could be demonstrated, the first objection remains valid. If we admit the probable presence of numerological symbolism in *The Master and Margarita,* we must possess the means of differentiation between the instances in which a number is used as a symbol and those in which it appears in a neutral narrative function. Such a distinction can be made. First, Bulgakov sometimes encodes an important idea by deforming the "numerical" material of the original source. This is a typical example of Bulgakov's technique of cryptography. Second, there are instances in which numerological symbolism has been established beyond doubt: apartment numbers, ward numbers in Stravinsky's clinic, the number of the train car in which Berlioz' uncle arrived in Moscow from Kiev, etc.

Another necessary condition for the successful decoding of numerological symbols in the novel is the realization that in this system of symbolism a symbolic number possesses a dual nature. On the one hand, it points emblematically at the translogical essence of a phenomenon and thus performs a function similar to that of a metaphor. On the other hand, a mystical number is antinomical in its nature: it can be used to denote opposite, even antagonistic aspects of existence. This means that in numerological symbolism, in distinction from its mathematical usage, a number imparts not the quantitative but the qualitative characteristics of reality.

How does Bulgakov employ numerological symbols in *The Master and Margarita?* To begin with, numbers in the novel establish the locations of characters, objects, or events within the frame of reference of metaphysical good and evil which determines the dynamics of Bulgakov's universe. Correspondingly, numerical signification correlates the narrative patterns and meanings of a particular event, thus contributing both to the unfolding of the plot and to its ultimate understanding. Magic numbers hint at the true nature of what is going on in the Yershalaim and Moscow chapters,

identifying the positions of the novel's human protagonists in the struggle between Woland and Yeshua, creating a peculiar "Pythagorean" rhythm in the novel's universe, and pointing to the hidden forces acting behind the empirical facade of the events otherwise impeccably motivated within the three-dimensional confines of ancient Jerusalem or post-revolutionary Moscow.

Bulgakov himself hands the reader a clue towards deciphering the secret message of what is really happening in the pages of the novel. In other words, we are not only dealing with an example of what the Russian Formalists have called "revealing a technique," *obnazhenie priema*, in *The Master and Margarita*, but are also offered additional proof that Bulgakov's choice of numbers is not arbitrary. He must have used a numerological source, which is most likely to be in some way akin to esoteric doctrines of the Kabbalah. The clue permits us to identify emblematically the realms of the demonic (Woland), the sacred (Yeshua), and the profane (Pilate, Levy Matvey, The Master, Margarita, and others in the Yershalaim and Moscow chapters) in the novel. Following that, the elucidation of the relationship between those realms becomes possible.

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Let us take advantage of Bulgakov's kindness by taking the first step in the examination of the text. The uninvited stranger who takes a seat on the bench between Ivan Bezdomny and Berlioz predicts the impending death of Berlioz by making a rather strange and obscure statement: "One, two... Mercury in the second house... The Moon is gone... six—disaster... evening—seven... " Then he announces loudly and gaily, "Your head will be cut off!" (436).

This lengthy sentence is not just a parody on the jargon of astrology by Bulgakov, the mystifier. In reality, the statement precisely reproduces the hidden meaning of the event taking place on that Wednesday evening in the Park at the Patriarch's Ponds. It is, however, coated in the esoteric language of numbers. Let us examine the various numbers contained in the aforementioned sentence.

1) "One, two." "One" signifies in the Kabbalah the first Sephira, Kether, the primordial creative manifestation of God, "the I am." In Christian symbolism, "One" denotes God the Creator, revelation, and light. In this context, "two" represents polarity, primordial matter, and nature as opposed to its Creator. This is precisely the concrete personal situation

of the atheist Berlioz, who denies the existence of God. In the universally cosmic sense, this is the situation of Woland, Satan the theomast, who challenges the might of God.[33] The first part of the sentence contains, in literally two words, Bulgakov's cosmological conception within which the drama of the Yershalaim and Moscow chapters is realized.

2) "Mercury in the second house..." On the background of the cosmological frame of reference of the preceding phrase, this part of the passage is, naturally, related to the personal fate of Berlioz. The semantic precision of the imagery coupled with the aesthetic expressiveness inherent in it is also superb in its artistically multileveled structure. In astrology, Mercury is the Lord of Wednesday, the day on which Berlioz' life comes to an abrupt end. The personal character of the editor, an eloquent, intelligent man tending toward superficiality and dilettantism, is also shaped by the influence of that planet. Thus, both in terms of astrology and within the mechanism of the plot, Berlioz' life and death are related to Mercury. At the same time, in classical mythology Mercury is a psychopomp who escorts the souls of the dead to the underworld. This realm, too, has its number. It is, in fact, the "second house." In Rome, the number "two" was sacred to Pluto, god of the underworld. Thus "two" functions in Bulgakov's novel as an emblem of hell.

3) "The Moon is gone..." Both in Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* and in Goethe's *Faust,* moonlight is an emblem of spiritual substance, of the world of spirits in general. In Dante's *Paradiso,* the moon corresponds to the first Heaven. This part of Woland's statement underscores the absence of spirituality in the intellectual make-up of the materialistic editor and signifies his abandonment by the realm of light.

4) Naturally, in the fourth part of the passage, the "six" associated with the infernal "two" signifies a "disaster." In this context, "six" is the emblem of the Antichrist.

5) Correspondingly, the "seven" in the fifth part of the sentence is not the positive accomplishment of the sacred series of the days of Creation as the seventh day of God's "rest" and "light," but is associated with "evening," that is, the realm of darkness. Therefore, the number reveals itself as an emblem of punishment and retribution.

6) The sixth part of the statement, "Your head will be cut off," is the conclusion which foretells the editor's death.

The entire passage consist of six parts and it is through this number that the satanic nature of the stranger's knowledge becomes evident. Berlioz' personal fate is integrated in a cosmic rhythm. Yet the infernal series of numbers are perceptible in this rhythm. In the course of the narrative, following rules of mystic addition, these series adopt different guises in the flux of overlapping and intertwined events with the supernatural and natural agents sharing the same time–space continuum. At different points in Bulgakov's universe the very distinction between mythical and empirical time is abolished. In all such instances, mystical numbers point to the noumenal dynamics behind the phenomenal shell of the empirical events. In this chapter, the plot-determining and semantic functions of the numbers "two" and "six" will be traced in their infernal metamorphoses.

There is another important number in *The Master and Margarita* through which the demonic energy of the powers of darkness is projected into the empiric dimensions of the Yershalaim chapters. This is the number "three." Azazello, Koroviev, and Cat Behemoth constitute a demonic triad through which Woland's will materializes itself in action. His emblem is the diamond triangle found on his golden cigarette case and watch. As opposed to a triangle with the apex pointing upwards, which represents the Trinity, a triangle with the apex down symbolizes the underworld powers. It is an emblem of Satan. By means of this symbol, Woland's function in the novel is defined more accurately. He is the principal rival and antagonist of God. Satan *contra*-poses against the divine cosmos of light his own anticosmos of darkness by parodying the ontological structures of the realm of the sacred.

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The realm of the sacred enters the empirical level of the Yershalaim chapters through the personality of Yeshua Ha-Notsri. Bulgakov comes to the reader's aid again and by means of numerological symbolism makes it easier to penetrate into the mystery of Yeshua's nature. Earlier, in the first Moscow chapter, Bulgakov makes use of a parody on astrology to divulge the presence of demonic powers. Now in the first Yershalaim chapter, Bulgakov has recourse to his favorite technique of the deformation of the original source of information. According to the tradition of the Church, Jesus Christ was 33 years old in the year of his crucifixion. In *The Master and Margarita,* Yeshua Ha-Notsri is 27 years old. What is Bulgakov's purpose in selecting for the principal hero of his novel an age which, deviating from the traditionally accepted age of Jesus, adds nothing to the character of Yeshua from the viewpoint of realistic cogency?[34]

It is not too farfetched to assume that Bulgakov was searching for something more than merely a realistic verisimilitude of his Yeshua. The number "27" must be subjected to somewhat closer scrutiny. In mystic addition, "two" plus "seven" equals "nine." In ancient Judea and among the Pythagoreans, "nine" was held sacred as the number of truth. Any multiplication of the number "nine" produces a complex number with the sum total of its digits ultimately reducible to "nine." As the treble "nine," "twenty-seven" can be seen as a cipher of the triune Truth, that is, the symbol of the Christian Godhead. There is, however, more to it. In the mystical numerology of the Kabbalah, the Great Name of God, as it is expressed through the tetragrammaton YHWH, has seventy-two letters. Therefore, in Bulgakov's system of cognitive aesthetics, Yeshua, the Son of Man, can be considered to be the perfect image and likeness of God and, as God's "mirror reflection," is thus related to the mystical "twenty-seven." Moreover, to complete the circle of this symbolic reasoning, the Hebrew alphabet consists of twenty-two consonants which, together with their five variants, make again the number "twenty-seven." Following the train of symbolic associations, the assumption is not improbable that, in Bulgakov's novel, Yeshua, the Son of Man, is also the Word of God, the divine λόγος, that is, the Son of God of Christian theology (John 1:1–5). Furthermore, in ancient Rome, "twenty-seven" was a numinous number associated with the idea of human sacrifice: on May 14, 27 human puppets were thrown into the river. Yeshua Ha-Notsri, executed on the 14th of Nisan, appears, therefore, as a teacher of divine Truth, which asserts itself in the world through the crucifixion. Blending elements of Old Judaic and Roman numerological symbolism in the single image structure, Bulgakov encoded in the language of literature the idea of the universal significance of the new faith "where there is neither gentile nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:11).

Thus, the realm of the sacred manifests itself in the novel mainly through two numbers: "three," as an emblem of the divine Trinity, and "nine," which itself is the treble triad, a symbol of truth. There is another sacred number in the novel: "eight." This number appears in its plot-determining function in the Moscow chapters. Therefore, it will be examined separately.

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The realm of human existence is signified in the system of magic numbers by the number "five." "Five" represents the unity between the spiritual masculine principle of "three" and "two," the principle of the Great

Mother Earth. Its variations in the novel are further represented by the numbers 23, 32, 50, and 302. The existential human condition in this world is represented in the Yershalaim chapters by the Fifth Procurator of Judea, the Equestrian Pontius Pilate. It should be emphasized at this point that the numerical characterization of the Procurator is not dictated to Bulgakov by his historical sources. In nineteenth-century historical literature, Pilate is listed sometimes as the sixth, sometimes as the fifth procurator of Judea. This discrepancy is caused by a minor disagreement among historians on the question concerning the identity of the first procurator of Judea. If Sabinus (4 A.D.) is recognized as the first, then Pilate is the sixth. However, if Coponius (6 A.D.) is considered to be the first, then Pilate is the fifth. Bulgakov has the option of a number which serves his intentions in the most expressive manner.

At first glance, the number "six" appears to be more appropriate, since it would underscore the role of satanic forces in making Pilate pass the death sentence against Yeshua. However, in such numerological context, the will of the Procurator would be determined. Being reduced to a mere instrument of superhuman powers, Pilate would not be able to act otherwise. This is, in fact, the conclusion made by E. Etkind who, however, treats the episode of the Pilate–Yeshua confrontation within the framework of social and not metaphysical determinants.[35] In selecting the number "five," Bulgakov made Pilate a morally responsible participant in the Yershalaim drama, in which he is expected to make a free choice between objective good and objective evil. But, since Yeshua also belongs to the realm of human existence, "five" is polarized antinomically in the aspects of human spirituality and human brute force. The crucified, *ras-piatyi,* Yeshua (in the system of Russian adjectives, the prefix *raz-* denotes the intensification or epitomization of the underlying quality), who heralds the advent of Heavenly Jerusalem *(civitas Dei),* is confronted by the Fifth, *piatyi,* Procurator of Judea Pontius Pilate, a representative of *Roma aeterna,* the fullest realization of a terrestrial universal state *(civitas terrena)* in history. In the literary genre of the modern European novel, Bulgakov reverts to the problem of a philosophy of history as it was first formulated by St. Augustine, the fifth-century Father of the Church.

Having elucidated the numerological archetypes in Bulgakov's novel, it is now possible to investigate how the cosmic mystery play unfolds itself in history through the complex interaction of its *dramatis personae.*

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There is a frequently reiterated opinion, according to which Woland is not really an accessory to the condemnation and execution of Yeshua.[36] In this line of criticism, Satan appears not so much as a rival and adversary of God but rather as a cosmic representative of the loyal and, even if with some reservations, benevolent opposition. Is this really so? What do the numbers reveal?

From the very beginning of the trial, the infernal "two" surrounds Yeshua as he is arrested by the Yershalaim authorities. "Two legionnaires" bring the prisoner to Pilate for an interrogation (436). "Two lines of soldiers" escort the condemned to the place of execution (588). Their *corpus delicti* is inscribed in "two languages," Aramaic and Greek, on the boards hung on the prisoners' neck (588). In this case, Bulgakov's intentional deformation of his source material is beyond all question. The Gospels are unanimous in their report that the inscription on Jesus' cross, announcing the nature of his crime, was written in three languages: Hebrew, Greek, and Latin (Luke 23:38; John 19:20). "Two thousand idle onlookers" accompany the somber procession (589). "Two lines of troops," Roman infantry and Syrian cavalry, cordon off Bald Mountain (588). "Two glaring spots" glitter on the breastplates of the centurion in charge of execution (591). Likewise, "the two white marble lions" (450) guarding the staircase in the garden of the Palace of Herod, where Pilate and Kaifa meet to decide the fate of Yeshua, may be convincingly associated with the devil who, "as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). In this particular case, Woland is also after the souls of the Procurator and the High Priest. Finally, "two dogs of unknown ownership who, for some unknown reason, found themselves on the hill" (588). Antinomic ambivalence, inherent in all archetypal symbols, determines the semantic function of this animal in the novel. On the one hand, the dog symbolizes loyalty and fearlessness (Banga, Tuzbubyon). On the other hand, it is, like the carrion vulture, an animal of the netherworld, death without resurrection (the black poodle, borrowed by Bulgakov from Goethe's *Faust,* is also Woland's emblem). The infernal function of dogs in the execution episode is conveyed by Bulgakov by means of their number, that is, "two." At the same time, the realistic motivation of the narrative, the three-dimensional optical and sound illusion of reality, are brought to such a degree of artistic perfection that the reader does not notice off-hand the presence and actions of the supersensual and supernatural powers behind the hard material surface of the imagery.

Meanwhile, Bulgakov himself reminds his readers that the numbers in the Yershalaim chapters have more than a descriptive function. The signal is

sent, as in many other instances, by means of an intentional deformation of the original source material. The Gospel text mentions the number of soldiers who crucified Jesus and divided his garments as "four" (John 19:23). As with the age of Yeshua and the number of languages specifying the nature of prisoners' crimes, a change in the number of the executioners adds nothing to the realistic plasticity of the crucifixion episode. Yet, also in this instance, Bulgakov deforms the information of his source and invents his own number of executioners, namely "six" (588). As it was pointed out earlier, "six" is the number of the Antichrist. Fifteen men from the Secret Service of the Procurator accompany the carts dispatched to perform the burial of the dead bodies (762). In the system of numerological symbolism, "fifteen" is a number of the devil. The mystical addition of its digits totals the same infernal "six." The sacrilegious "three" is also at work in the execution scene: "Three carrion vultures" soar over Bald Mountain "in the anticipation of the forthcoming feast" (592). In the novel they are the opposite of the swallow, a bird that symbolizes the rebirth of life and the cross (hence the desecration of the swallow image in the false resurrection episode in the chapter "Satan's Great Ball"). In this connection, the "black birds" circling in the sky prior to the decapitation of Berlioz (433) belong to essentially the same set of symbols. Conspicuously, in this particular instance Bulgakov uses the verb *chertit'*, that is, to "draw a line or plan" and also to "circle."[37] Etymologically, it is related to *chort*, that is, the devil, and the verb thus optimally expresses the sinister "metaphysical" significance of the event in several layers of meaning. Similarly, the Syrian cavalry regiment, galloping "in a column of threes" (458) to cordon off the place of Yeshua's execution after the proclamation of the death verdict by Pilate, can be related to the numerological context of the episode. Historically, "the column of threes" is a military term for a mounted formation in the cavalry of Bulgakov's time. Thus the use of this motif structure is impeccably motivated on the realistic level of the narrative. The motif is introduced by Bulgakov for the first time in *The White Guard*. "In the column of threes," Colonel Bolbotun's regiment advances against the doomed City (121). The realistic precision of this seemingly minor detail would pass the scrutiny of Tolstoy, who himself was an unsurpassed master of literary battle scenes. Yet, if the reader keeps in mind that in *The White Guard*, the fall of Kiev to Petlyura's army is perceived as a violent intrusion of demonic forces, in Dostoevsky's meaning of the word, into the course of human events, the numerological function of the "column of threes" motif becomes evident. In *The White Guard* the horse and rider motif takes on an apocalyptic dimension.[38] Therefore, "three" associated with war, homicide, class hatred, and national strife is used by Bulgakov as an antinomic signifier for

the forces of evil which, in their challenge to the order of creation, called into being by the divine "three," falsely pretend to be champions of justice and law on the level of human history. These forces act through the medium of the Revolution in *The White Guard.* They pose as protectors of the State and Law in the Yershalaim chapters of *The Master and Margarita.* Revolution and reaction are the two visible manifestations of metaphysical evil in Bulgakov's novels, as they are in Bely's *Petersburg.* The "three legged stool" also belongs to this group of symbols. Sitting on it, Aphranius observes the agony of Yeshua (590). Such a stool reappears as part of Woland's furniture in Apartment No. 50 in Moscow. The rear leg of the stool later breaks, causing the fall of the Variety Theater bartender (623). Satan's personal interest and participation in Yeshua's murder is confirmed by magic numbers.

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Symbolically, the human condition in its relation to the antagonistic forces of metaphysical good and evil is reflected in the numerological characteristics of House No. 302-bis. To begin with, this six-story house is built in the architectural shape of *pokoi,* the literal meaning of which is "rest" or "peace" (491). In the terminology of architecture, the term *pokoi* implies that the structural outline of the house corresponds in its shape to the Russian letter "П." *Pokoi* is the name of the letter in the Church-Slavonic alphabet. In the context of the novel this word also carries a symbolic connotation.

On the surface, everything in this house seems to be in good order and the "six" may be seen as a number invested with a positive function. It can be associated with the biblical six days of Creation after which God "rested from all his work" (Gen. 2:3) on the seventh day. *Pokoi,* rest, is thus a successful completion of the series of creative activities to which the sacred "seven" alludes. This superficial impression is, however, negated by the meaning of 302-bis. As it was pointed out, "three" and "two" signify the male and female principles of human nature respectively and their sum total in magic addition equals "five." But, as the number indicates, there is no genuine unity between these principles because the "nothingness," "zero," that is, evil, has corrupted human nature by splitting it and infecting it with ontological strife. This evil is literally the *bis,* that is, the devil in Ukrainian. Similarly, the "five" in Apartment No. 50 is also afflicted by "nothingness": its inhabitants are corrupted by the vices of avarice and depravity.[39] Precisely for the reason that there is no "peace" in the house, it is not what it claims to be: a genuine housing association, a close-knit community of

human personalities. Instead, it is an accidental and unstable assemblage of quarreling individuals habitually scheming against each other.[40] Therefore, the numbers are antinomically polarized in their signification. The "six" turns out to be an emblem of the Antichrist, of "disaster." The sevenfold mentioning of the "sixth entrance" in connection with the demonic activities in Apartment No. 50 (511, 529, 576, 619, 664, 710, 757) integrates the "six" with the demonic number "seven" and links both numbers with the numerological structures in the episode dealing with Woland's prediction of Berlioz' death. Soviet Moscow, in this context, is a society marching along the road of evil. At the same time, the vices of this "new society," which Woland skillfully manipulates for his own purposes, are, in the words of Nietzsche, "the all too human" vices.

The "32 applications" to permit moving in Berlioz' apartment submitted to the chairman of the housing cooperative by the tenants of House 302-bis containing threats, slander, and denunciations add up in the magic addition of the digits to the same human "five." Yet, the last "two" of this number, composed of digits in *descending* order, alludes to an essential feature of this kind of human activity: its kinship with demonic evil. Bulgakov himself helps the reader uncover the hidden meaning of this number by emphasizing that Nikanor Ivanovich received "thirty-two" applications from the tenants within "two hours" (510). Similarly, "thirty-two" years, the age of the hack poet and opportunist Ryukhin (489), have essentially the same meaning. It is now clear why the number "two" predominates the description of the events in Apartment No. 50 with its disappearing tenants. Bulgakov's comment associating the activities of Soviet punitive agencies with the machinations of the devil is both ironic and satirically explanatory. The other numbers of negative meaning are "thirteen," the "devil's dozen," and "eleven," a number of sin, moral transgression, and intemperance in the Christian system of numerology. Satan operates in this world with the intention of corrupting human souls and leading them to their irreversible doom.

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The realm of the sacred is represented in the novel by three numbers: "three," "eight," and "nine." In contrast to the numbers denoting the realm of demons and related to punishment, temptation, and death, the sacred numbers are associated with help and salvation. Moreover, they are numbers "invested with power." For example, the number "three" indicates the proximity of a person to the trinitarian Deity. Night, associated at this point with the forces of evil, "retreats" before "three flickering lights" carried into Pilate's room before Levy Matvey's entrance (743). This

particular image is related to the liturgical symbolism of the Orthodox Church's Easter service and will be discussed in the next chapter.

Perhaps the most significant sacred number in the Moscow chapters is the number "eight." Symbolizing "the Eighth Day of Creation," or rebirth in new life, "eight" turns out to be the number that points to the resurrection of Christ and the transfiguration of the world. In Christian numerology, the triple "eight," 888, represents the sacred number of Jesus, his name written in Hebrew letters. It is opposed to the triple "six," 666, the number of the Beast of the Apocalypse and the Antichrist. In the Greek alphabet, "eight" is the number both of Yahweh (God the Father) and Christ (God the Son). These observations explain why the number "eight" predominates in the Moscow chapters. In the Yershalaim chapters, Yeshua appears in the aspect of Truth which is to be sacrificed. In the Moscow chapters, he asserts his will in the victorious aspect of the Savior. In this system of symbolic imagery, "eight" is associated with another symbol of the triumphing Jesus, with that of the "rooster," the herald of The Eighth Day of Creation.

The *third* cry of a rooster saves the financial director of the Variety Theater, Rimsky, from the female vampire Hella. The crowing of roosters dispels the delusion of the false resurrection at the Great Ball of Satan (691). In the overall context of the novel it means that the "eight" of Yeshua's resurrection and divine renewal of life triumphs over the "seven" of the satanic pseudo-creation. It may be recalled that both Woland and Koroviev emphatically state that their "performance" in Moscow should last *seven* days (497, 512–4). Contrary to their original intention, Woland and his demonic retinue are compelled, in the end of the novel, to depart from Moscow on the fourth day, that is on the eve of Easter Sunday.

It is no doubt significant that the number "eight," meaning moral "rebirth," appears in the novel whenever its characters embark on the path of a morally relevant transformation of their previous lives, no matter how incremental this change might seem. In other words, Yeshua grants them a second chance. The particular instances of this semantic function of the "eight" will be discussed in detail in the chapters dealing with the events in Moscow and with the fate of the novel's principal protagonists.

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Having so far established the numerological archetypes built into the structure of the novel, it is now possible to come to conclusions pertaining to the place and function of numerology in *The Master and Margarita*.

Systematic decoding of the magic numbers demonstrates that Woland is an implacable enemy of Yeshua and the tempter of mankind. It further indicates that people who preserve even some vestiges of moral instinct may rely on the effective assistance of Yeshua and thwart the intentions of Satan.

Nonetheless, numerological symbols are strictly limited in their semantic potentialities. Being antinomical by their very nature, numbers by themselves cannot solve the problem of the ontological interrelation between metaphysical good and evil. Therefore, remaining solely within the parameters of mystical numbers, the inference is admissible that the philosophical and aesthetical unity of Bulgakov's last novel is determined and shaped by the author's Manichaean view of reality. In such a model of the universe, good and evil constitute polar and, at the same time, complementary and coequal principles of being. In other words, Bulgakov's metaphysics is determined by that type of dualism, in which Satan is co-powerful with Christ. But is this really so?

To find a satisfactory answer to this question, essential for the ultimate interpretation of the novel, a complex set of other sources must be investigated and evaluated in their relationship to the narrative structures, imagery, and acting personae of *The Master and Margarita,* a modern mystery play in the genre of the contemporary European novel.

CHAPTER I: NOTES

[1] M. Chudakova, "Arkhiv M. A. Bulgakova," *Zapiski otdela rukopisei gos. biblioteki im. V. I. Lenina* 37 (1976), p. 130.

[2] A. Belyi, *Simvolizm* (Moscow, 1910), p. 79.

[3] Mikhail Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita* in *Romany* (Moscow, 1973), p. 702. Page references to this edition are subsequently given in the text. Translations are mine.

[4] D. Chizhevskii, "Chto takoe realizm?" *Novyi zhurnal* 75 (1964), pp. 142–4.

[5] Bulgakov cherished no illusions about the chances of his book being published during his lifetime. On June 15, 1938 he wrote to Elena Sergeevna, his third wife, "You ask what will happen? I do not know. Probably, you will lay the manuscript into a desk or wardrobe... and from time to time you will remember it. We do not know our future, though.... Presently, I am interested in your judgment. Whether I shall know the judgment of the readers, nobody can say" (M. Chudakova, *op. cit.*, p. 132). It is due to the "judgment" and efforts of Bulgakov's wife that a censored edition of *The Master and Margarita* saw the light of the world in 1966-67 in the journal *Moskva*.

[6] A. Zerkalov, *Evangelie Mikhaila Bulgakova* (Ann Arbor, 1984), p. 245.

[7] Viach. Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2 (Brussels, 1974), p. 537.

[8] Belyi, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 225.

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 128, 210.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 207.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 199.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 183.

[15] M. A. Bulgakov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1 (Ann Arbor, 1982), p. 227.

[16] Belyi, *op, cit.*, p. 224.

[17] Ivanov, *op. cit.*, p. 554.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 556.

[19] "Art is not subject to subordination under any religious dogma. On the contrary, the symbols of religions are created in the process of living art. They become dogmas in the process of art's dying" (Belyi, *op. cit.*, p. 223).

[20] *Ibid.*, pp. 166–7.

[21] Bulgakov's penchant for blending dramatical and musical elements as a compositional principle of his prose determines its Symbolist quality. In Bely's words, "this combined presence of dramatism and musicality, this combination of both elements, inevitably leads to symbolism" (*Ibid.*, p. 172). In this context, the compositional technique of the fugue may be seen as a conscious effort on the part of Bulgakov to convey the ultimate meaning of *The Master and Margarita* as an "Easter mystery" to the readers (E. M(illior), "Tri snovideniia Ivana," *Vestnik Russkogo Studencheskogo Khristianskogo Dvizheniia* 119, Nos. 3–4 [1976], p. 228).

[22] A comparison of the two lexically, syntactically, and semantically related statements may be instructive. "Our life in many instances shapes itself in such a way that the rational part of it steps into the foreground. Hence our willingness to view all manifestations of life in light of the law of the *sufficient reason.* We forget that the realm of art is outside this law's competence" (Belyi, *op. cit.*, p. 164). "Berlioz' life shaped itself so that he was not accustomed to facing unusual phenomena. Turning even more pale he stared and thought in utter confusion, 'It cannot be!'" (p. 424). It is on the background of Bely's preceding statement that Berlioz' "noumenal" self as a shallow rationalist and hack journalist incompetent of pronouncing judgments on the nature of art and history is revealed.

[23] Belyi, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] M. Chudakova, "Usloviia suschestvovaniia, *V mire knig* 12 (1974), p. 80.

[26] B. Gasparov, "Iz nabliudenii nad motivnoi strukturoi romana M. A. Bulgakova 'Master i Margarita'," *Slavica Hierosolymitana* 3 (1978), p. 199.

[27] M. Chudakova, "Arkhiv M. A. Bulgakova," p. 64.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 97.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 141; E. M(illior), *op. cit., VRSKhD* 119, Nos. 3–4 (1976), p. 230.

[30] Belyi, *op. cit.*, pp. 135, 175–6, 202.

[31] I. Belza, "Genealogiia 'Mastera i Margarity'," *Kontekst-78* (Moscow, 1978), p. 233; S. Schulze, "The Epigraphs in *White Guard, RLT* 15 (1978), p. 215.

[32] V. Levshin, "Sadovaia 302-bis," *Teatr* 11 (1971), pp. 116–7.

[33] Laszlo Tikos, "Some Notes on the Significance of Gerbert Aurillac in Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita," Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 15, Nos. 2–3 (1981), p. 322, n. 8. Bulgakov's literary source in which "two" is associated with the ominous presence of a demonic being is A. Chaianov's

Venediktov ili dostoprimechatelnye sobytiia zhizni moei (Moscow, 1922), p. 13.

[34] Zerkalov explains Bulgakov's option for Yeshua's age of 27 years by accepting 33 A.D. as the year of Jesus' crucifixion and 6 A.D. as the year of his birth. This was the year when, during Quirinius' tenure as the Roman governor of Syria, a general census was held. According to the evangelist Luke, Jesus was born in the year of this census in Bethlehem (Luke 2:1–7). The explanation presents a cogent argument (Zerkalov, *op. cit.*, pp. 74–5). However, whatever the merits of the argument may be, it does not square well with another statement by the same evangelist that Jesus began his mission when he was "about the age of thirty years" (Luke 3:23). In any case, Bulgakov must have been aware of the symbolic potentialities of "twenty-seven." Incidentally, recent research makes 5 B.C. and 30 A.D. the most probable years of Jesus' birth and crucifixion. If this calculation is correct, Jesus died when he was 35 years old (J. Dheilly, *Dictionnaire Biblique* [Tournai, 1964], p. 193).

[35] E. Etkind, "Manuskripte brennen nicht," *Akzente* 4 (1968), p. 323. Taking a somewhat similar line of reasoning, V. Petelin believes that, following the logic of their convictions within the body politic of their time, Yeshua, Pilate, and Kaifa are each right in their own way (V. Petelin, *Rodnye sud'by*, 2nd. ed. [Moscow, 1976], p. 232). If pursued to their logical conclusions, whatever the possible clarifications and reservations might be, these critical views inevitably relativize the theme of Pilate's cowardice, and the Procurator's torments of conscience lose their objective moral significance. Such a conclusion does not accord, however, with the plot-determining function which Pilate's internal conflict fulfills in correlating the compositional structure and the meaning of the novel.

[36] R. Beerman, "Bulgakows 'Meister and Margarita' und die Wert-ordnung," *Osteuropa* 20 (1970), p. 182; Lakshin, *op. cit.*, *Novyi mir* 6 (1968), p. 296; E. Proffer, "On *The Master and Margarita*, *RLT* 6 (1973), p. 546.

[37] O. Kushlina and Iu. Smirnov, "Magiia slova," *Pamir* 6 (1986), p. 117.

[38] D. M. Bethea, *The Shape of Apocalypse in Russian Fiction* (Princeton, 1989), p. 194.

[39] The links between number "302" and the devil are already prefigured in *Theatrical Novel* when the Mephistopheles figure Rudolfi suggests to Maksudov that the word "devil" be deleted from page 302 of the latter's manuscript (287). In light of Bulgakov's predilection for numerological cipher, the other two numbers in Rudolfi's suggestion become decodable and reveal the demonic aspect in the person of the publisher, no matter who

might have been his empirical prototype among Moscow literary figures in the twenties. In addition to the deletion on page 302, Rudolfi also suggests removing the word "Apocalypse" from page 1 and the word "archangels" from page 71. The number "one" stands both for the Creator and revelation. The sum total of the digits "seven" and "one" equals "eight." This latter number relates to the New Heaven and Earth indicating the "Eighth Day of Creation" which follows the Last Judgment inaugurated by the archangels' trumpets. Clearly, Rudolfi wants Maksudov's manuscript to be purged of all mystical and apocalyptical imagery which alludes to the idea of the Antichrist in the Russian revolution by making the deletion of the undesirable passages of Maksudov's novel a condition for its publication. For more on the cryptographic function of the numbers 5, 10, 50, 118, and 302 in *The Master and Margarita*, see Gasparov, *op. cit.*, *Slavica Hierosolymitana* 3 (1978), p. 213.

[40] Explicitly, the antinomic opposition between the life-promoting "peace" and the "peace of death," *miortvyi pokoi*, appears in *The White Guard* encoded in the description of Bulgakov's own High School built according to the architectural design of *pokoi* (88–9).